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KILMER'S CAP

Batman is back (and Michael Keaton isn't) in Joel Schumacher's blockbuster reinvention of the Dark Knight mythos

by A.C. Ferrante

Gotham City can prove an intimidating milieu for the uninitiated, with its skyful of towering skyscrapers, intricate labyrinths of bridges and 60-foot, angst-ridden, muscular statues.

It's a classic World's Fair view filtered through a dark knight eye—cold, damp and oppressive. The citizens have no safety in numbers, crime is an incurable disease, and petty crooks transform into larger-than-life megavillains overnight.

Thank goodness for winged vigilantes. If there wasn't a Batman to save the day, all hope would certainly be lost for Gotham.

Thus, after another three-year hiatus from the big screen (not counting the animated *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*), everyone's favorite caped crusader returns to battle evildoers in *Batman Forever*.



Adam West



Michael Keaton

"I think comic book characters beg to be reinvented as times change," says the film's screenwriter, Akiva Goldsman (Lee and Janet Batchler wrote a prior draft and share screen credits). "I think what Joel wanted to do from the start was do a new Batman and give him a new kind of sensibility."

ED CRUSADE



I also think we all wanted to see a side of Batman we hadn't seen before and discover what fundamentally makes him the way he is. So we're looking again at the origin of Batman and his relationship with Alfred, as well as the introduction of Dick Grayson/Robin. Here's the creation of another avenger in a way that is very redolent of the way Batman was created. Batman has spent a lifetime dedicated to vengeance, and now Robin is somebody on the verge of beginning the same lifestyle."

REMAKING THE MYTH

It's a new approach to the filmic Batman mythos, which is arguably more character- (and comic book-) driven than concept-driven compared with the previous films in the series. This time visionary auteur Tim Burton has stepped to the sidelines, serving only as a producer (though his involvement during filming has been very minimal) while Joel Schumacher [*Flatliners*, *The Lost Boys*] takes over the director's chair.

"Even though this is third of the Warner Bros. *Batman* movies, for almost all of us it was our first," says Schumacher, who received Burton's blessing early on to continue the franchise. "What we really wanted to do was create a living comic book."

Of course, Burton's absence (he made a couple of token appearances on the set, but that's about all) isn't the only change that the famed DC Comics creation is undergoing for the third installment of the highly profitable series, which has grossed over \$700 million worldwide.

Val Kilmer has taken over the Bat-reigns from Michael Keaton, a whole arsenal of Bat-accessories have been redesigned courtesy of Production Designer Barbara Ling, and the nation's hottest actor-comedian, Jim Carrey, and one of Hollywood's most revered actors, Tommy Lee Jones, add to what's becoming a long line of memorable baddies as this new *Batman* gets a facelift for the '90s.

"I think it's a convention of the *Batman* movies to have multiple villains," says Goldsman. "I think Joel is also very talented and skilled with ensemble pieces. The thing that Joel has taught me is that the fear of multiple characters is only a fear, and that if you walk in thinking the form can't hold, then you won't be able to manage it. You need to be clever and honest, and that makes the film more of a ride, and obviously what we want this movie to be is a great ride."

The first half of that ride is coming to an end on a rather warm March afternoon on the Warner Bros. lot. Stage 22 is where the action is happening, as the origin of Dick Grayson/Robin is being shot.

The setting is the Hippodrome in Gotham City, a huge art deco coliseum where a tented circus is placed to make it a little more traditional. Six strongmen statuettes (ironically wearing the same exhausted expressions that the filmmakers are currently wearing) hold up a circus tent where the Flying Graysons are performing in front of an audience of Gotham's upper-crust elite. When Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones) enters the scene, he kills off the entire family of flying trapeze artists except for



COLOR OF NIGHT: Barbara Ling's production design harkens back to the original four-color comics rather than Tim Burton's goth milieu. Location filming included the Warner Bros. backlot and Exchange Street in New York.

young Dick Grayson (Chris O'Donnell), who ends up saving the day while Bruce Wayne (fearful of revealing his true identity) watches from the stands helplessly.

"It's funny, when I was in college I was in this fraternity with a bunch of guys. They all wanted to go to a party as superheroes and they were all convinced that I should be Robin," laughs O'Donnell. "I said, 'There's no way I'm putting on that costume,' so the whole idea fell through because I wouldn't do it. So now, here I am years later, playing Robin."

While O'Donnell was only forced to wear the green tights and red vest suit as one of the Flying Graysons (a clever nod to the TV show's traditional garb), the rest of Grayson's persona is definitely no Burt Ward. Much like his big Bat brother in the first two installments, Robin has been given the same dark overtones, not to mention a high-tech costume to boot.

"I wanted to make Robin tougher because I thought it was more of a challenge to Batman," says O'Donnell. "I think with Val Kilmer and myself being cast in the parts, as opposed to Michael Keaton and a young actor, it really changed the dynamic of the relationship. It's less of a father/son relationship and it's more like a big brother/little brother kind of thing."

Other than a few high-fall stunts from a trapeze throughout the afternoon, the set is very low-key since *Batman Forever* is currently winding down principal photography as they face one more day of shooting before going into postproduction.

"Nothing prepares you for the world

of *Batman*," confesses the film's producer, Peter MacGregor Scott. "When you're in the world of Gotham, nothing exists. Nothing is standard. You can't go down to the Price Club and get everything you're going to need for the picture to put on-camera. Not a watch, not a cup or a glass—you're creating complete environments. This is the first movie I've done where you're creating a comic book from the ground up. Even in a period movie, depending on the period, you can get wardrobe that is already made. But here everything is tweaked and Gothamized."

ROAD TO GOTHAM

With a 102-day shooting schedule (the film went over schedule by only four days), a roughly \$70 million budget, over 70 major sets being constructed in and around Los Angeles and a crew of over 1,000, *Batman Forever* has been an arduous undertaking compounded by the fact that the film is committed to a mid-June release date. Shooting commenced last September and the production has been spared any major mishaps, unlike its summer competitor, *Waterworld*, which has seen one major disaster after another, inflating the cost of that film to over \$150 million.

Nevertheless, a tight postproduction window has led to a seemingly never-ending editing process (editing began as soon as the film was delivered wet from the lab) and a need to complete over 254 visual elements in a little less than three months.

"The film was mounted with an ambi-

tious schedule for postproduction, considering the scope of the work that was in it," observes Visual Effects Supervisor John Dykstra, who was one of the original special effects pioneers on *Star Wars*. "The film has got virtually every kind of visual effects technique imagined in it. We're using miniatures extensively to establish the look of Gotham, and in some cases we're mixing miniatures with computer-generated images and with live-action photography. So it's a true cross section with the types of techniques you might use to create visual illusions."

So what can we expect from Bruce Wayne/Batman this time out? How about yet another batch of colorful diversions, romantic liaisons and a bevy of mentally disturbed archvillains.

At the top of the list is Edward Nygma (Jim Carrey), a former Wayne Enterprises laboratory scientist who looks up to his wealthy boss Bruce Wayne with bushy-eyed idolatry. When his ideas are rejected by Wayne, he decides to plot revenge and in the process becomes the quizzically dangerous Riddler.

"Like all great artists, Jim is much more disciplined than he comes off," notes Schumacher. "Within his spontaneity you have a framework of what he's going to do each take. But every take is original. His moves may be the same, and his dialogue will be perfect, but we don't roll the cameras and he just goes insane. I don't think people realize that. Everything in comedy is timing, and that timing doesn't happen by random spontaneous madness."

Also endangering Gotham is former district attorney turned deranged madman Harvey Dent, played by Tommy Lee Jones. Two-Face has escaped from Arkham Asylum and is plotting revenge on Batman. Dent's world is shattered in half and he is transformed into Two-Face—complete with two separate girlfriends, Sugar (Drew Barrymore) and Spice (Debbi Mazar)—after being disfigured by a crime boss on the stand.

According to Schumacher, Jones was his only choice to play Two-Face (although Billy Dee Williams played the D.A. in the original *Batman* film).

"Tommy is perfect to be the district attorney of Gotham City, because he had just played the district attorney in *The Client* for me," says Schumacher. "Plus there has to be two sides to him. There had to be the rational lawyer and there had to be the criminally insane, evil, psychotic Two-Face that you know. So I thought, *Who is a great actor who can do a lawyer and maniac in the same body?*"

If this double villainous assault wasn't enough plot development for one *Batman* movie, how about the origin of Robin, who vows to avenge the deaths of his parents at the hands of Two-Face?

"There is a classic relationship that we reexamine and kind of give a psychological reality to which is somewhat different than the original notion of Robin," says Screenwriter Goldsman. "It's not an intricate partnership. Like all great relationships, it starts with conflict, and we have somewhere to go in terms of the pairing of the two. It's a way of revising the Batman and Robin story while still staying true to the characters, their origins and their dynamics."

At this point the only thing missing from the story is the requisite love interest, which comes in the heavenly shape of Dr. Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman), a psychiatrist who stirs up a rather intriguing love triangle between only two people—she falls for Batman while Bruce Wayne falls for her.

Having been steeped in psychology since he was a child (his parents come from a long line of shrinks, and for ten years he consulted and taught other doctors how to deal with emotionally handicapped children), Goldsman found the duality of the characters to be perfect for dissection and exploration.

"Working in mental health obviously assisted in the creation of the characters," says Goldsman. "In this particular case, it was great fun because everyone is aberrant and hyperbolic. Everything is exaggerated in Gotham City. Everyone is also really smart. The way they solve problems is they go on lifelong catharses. They build inventions that help them work on their missions."

But despite all the film's many changes from established Bat lore, Director Schumacher was intent on

retaining certain elements established previously—thus the connective thread to the previous films are returning *Bat*-alumni Michael Gough (as the forever-loyal Wayne butler, Alfred) and Pat Hingle (as Commissioner Gordon).

"I was talking on the phone with Michael Gough and we agreed that we are the bookends of the series," says Hingle. "Alfred and Commissioner Gordon are the bookends of the situations, and they just fill the film in with little Jokers and Penguins and Riddlers and that sort of thing. They even have a different Batman, yet Alfred and Police Commissioner Gordon go on."

Comparing the two Bat-actors, Hingle notes that Kilmer is physically taller than Keaton, and feels that the latter was never given the proper credit he deserved for his Bruce Wayne/Batman characterization.

"Batman is indefinitely a more difficult role to play than the Penguin or the Joker," says Hingle. "The villains got the more fantastic stuff, particularly Jack Nicholson. Certainly Jack Nicholson and Danny DeVito are fine actors, but it takes more of a subtlety to play Batman/Bruce Wayne that it doesn't take to play these other roles."

As a veteran of all three films, Hingle also notes that the directing style of Schumacher and Burton are worlds apart as well.

"Joel is what you call an actor's director—he communicates with actors very well," says Hingle. "If you want proof of that, just look what he did with *The Client* and how he pulled that performance out of the kid who had



never acted before—he had a major role in the film. I was never sure with Tim, however, if I was giving him what he needed—or what he wanted. Tim is like one of these heavenly creatures. If someone told me that Tim was an alien who had come down from another planet and had only been here a few years, I would think those were awfully sweet people from the planet he came from."



Catwoman and Keaton don't return in *Batman Forever*.

THE CAPE & COWL CONVERSION

After Michael Keaton abandoned Gotham, Val Kilmer came to its rescue

Holy facelifts, Batman, what did you do to yourself? Anyone who has followed the behind-the-scenes merry-go-round on *Batman Forever* is well aware of Michael Keaton's departure from the role of the millionaire-turned-black-caped-avenger.

According to *Batman Forever* Director Joel Schumacher, the Keaton departure was an issue between the actor and Warner Bros., and no one else. "I was not present or involved in the parting," he admits. "However, I know all of us on *Batman* and everybody at Warner Bros. wishes Michael well."

Fortunately, Schumacher always had one actor in mind as an alternative—Val Kilmer.

"When I went to see *Tombstone* I thought Val was extraordinary, and thought someday, some way, he would be a good Bruce Wayne," says the director. "But I really just mused about it, I'm not quite sure what transpired, but at a certain point my bosses called me and said, 'Have you thought of anyone else to play Batman?' and I said, 'Val Kilmer.'"

Adios Schumacher, "I thought nothing of it, and then a couple of weeks later I was called into their office and they asked me, 'Would you still like to make *Batman* with Val Kilmer?' and I said, 'Absolutely.'"

Finding the elusive actor was the tough part. Kilmer was roaming Africa doing research on a script he was writing about a man who spent many years with primitive tribes, and not even the actor's agent could find him.

"They couldn't get to him, he wasn't near a phone," recalls Schumacher. "Three days went by and then they found him—he was in a bat cave. Honest to God, he was in a bat cave in Africa. So they got him on the telephone near this remote bat cave, and his agent asked him if he wanted to do

Batman with Joel Schumacher, and he said yes."

So how does Val compare to Keaton?

"He's a very sexy Batman," says Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman. "He has a [Gothamite] physical presence and a great deal of

physical confidence and appeal. He's also young, a fighter, and carries himself that way. Val is also trained in martial arts, and that comes through in his performance, and as Bruce Wayne he's devastatingly charming."

—A.C. Ferrante

BATMAN LIVES

Coming up with a title for the third Batman film wasn't as easy as 1-2-3



Why does Hollywood have such a hard time coming up with titles for sequels?

Batman thankfully was spared the creative entropy of *Die Hard* (*With a Vengeance?* Ugh!), according to Director Joel Schumacher, who says he didn't want to just call it *Batman 3* or *B3*. Additionally, all revenge motifs were strictly forbidden.

"I didn't want it to be *Batman 3: This Time the Revenge Is Personal* kind of thing," Schumacher laughs, offering up *Batman Fights Back* as an extreme example. "I wanted the title to be mythic, because very early on I wanted to show people the mythic origins of how Bruce Wayne as a child became Batman. I wanted to use the imagery of some of the great things in the comic books of Wayne coming to terms with his dual personalities."

Also tossed around was the idea of calling it *Batman and Robin*. "It was actually the introduction of Robin, not a story of Batman and Robin," the director says of why that notion was abandoned.

"*Batman* has been successful since 1939, the TV show was an enormous hit and Tim's two films are legendary, so the title had to have a very timeless quality about it," observes Schumacher of settling on *Batman Forever*. "Ironically the first person that called me after we announced our title was Producer Don Simpson. He said, 'Joel, the title is brilliant—it's so mythic.' And I said, 'Yes, thank you, that's exactly what we hoped for.'"

BOY WONDERING

Distancing *Batman Forever* from its predecessors has been a conscious decision from the start. After the frightening grotesqueries of *Batman Returns*—which ultimately sent a nation of children running from theaters in cold-blooded fear due to the Penguin's disturbing makeup and unexpectedly violent nature (chomping into someone's nose that squirts blood is not what parents had expected)—it was natural that Warner Bros. wanted a kinder, gentler *Batman Forever*.

"This movie will be more surrealistic than scary," says Production Designer Barbara Ling. "It should not really be a film that kids should not go to. Danny DeVito's character in the last one was so vile that there was nothing redeeming about him. You have to have some fun. The character can be mad, but they should be able to crack a really good joke. There's a way to break from total

"Most kids are used to martial arts in films, so you couldn't have a *Batman* movie without having some martial arts in it," says Wilson. Ultimately Wilson agreed to take a break from filming his low-budget actioners to make a cameo in this big-budget epic as a gang member with a skull-painted face who gets into a tussle with Robin.

"I didn't do it for the money or the exposure—after all, I don't need to get beaten up in a film for exposure," laughs Wilson, who will soon be seen in his own upcoming fantasy/sci-fi project, *Grid Runners*. "It was more for my son Jonathan, who was excited by the thought that I would be in the film."

"It's very different on a studio film too," adds Wilson, who is a veteran of a number of Roger Corman martial arts quickies. "The small scene we did took four days to shoot, and on one of my films we would have looked at the scene, blocked it out and shot it before lunch."

"I wanted to make Robin tougher because I thought it was more of a challenge to Batman. I think with Val Kilmer being cast, it really changed the dynamic of the relationship."

—Actor Chris O'Donnell

horror. It's not a horror film. It's about Batman, and they were determined to make sure kids would come to this and that the violence came from Batman outsmarting people. The bad guys die by their own devices instead of Batman mowing them down. Rather than making him a killer, he becomes very brilliant in how he manipulates people."

The inclusion of Robin also helps lighten the tone of the film, which is another reason he finally made it to the screen in the latest outing after being written out in the previous two films. According to action star Don "The Dragon" Wilson, the producers solicited many Los Angeles-based martial artist-actors to come participate in the film because they wanted to bring a sort of *Might Morphin Power Rangers/VR Troopers/Three Ninjas* feeling to Robin's action scenes.

Another element that will be different the third time around will be the familiar baroque Danny Elfman score, with *Interview With a Vampire*'s Elliot Goldenthal cuing up for the latest installment.

"I thought what Danny Elfman did was wonderful, and if it turns out that we retain some of his stuff, I feel fine about that," says Goldenthal (it had not been decided if Elfman's *Batman* theme would be retained as the main title at press time). "There is a new director, there is a new actor playing Batman, and there's a new Batmobile. Everything is a lot different. So maybe the tone of it will be slightly different as well. In the beginning they were very adamant about keeping Elfman's theme, but more recently they've encouraged me to do something that could be different. I think the feeling is they want a clean

slate—that may change.”

Though it can be argued that the James Bond series has changed actors and behind-the-scenes personnel for years and still managed to retain the same classic theme, Schumacher comments, “I think it’s always fun to try something new, and if you don’t like it you can always go back to something tried and true, or you can have some old and some new mixed together.”

TO HELL AND BAT

Schumacher’s involvement with *Batman* began almost two years ago, shortly after the gothic fantasy *The Devil’s Advocate* fell through, and prior to beginning shooting on *The Client*.

The Devil’s Advocate was originally slated to star Brad Pitt as a young man who is recruited into a law firm and finds out he’s working for the devil.

“We were being rushed to start because *The Firm* was going to start



SWING SHIFT: The Flying Graysons perform for the last time. Note the familiar acrobatic accoutrements.

shooting, and in a metaphorical sense Tom Cruise plays a young lawyer who sells his soul to the devil,” says Schumacher. “So there was pressure on us to start shooting and get it out before *The Firm* came out. I thought we were rushing into something that would not work out well, so I aborted it.”

While Schumacher feels *The Devil’s Advocate* may yet be rescued from development hell, the 12 weeks of preproduction on the film before it was put into turnaround proved productive. In fact, he and Production Designer Barbara Ling (who had worked with him previously on *Falling Down*) had begun to scout New York locations for the film, which served as a foundation for *Batman Forever*.

“We were going to build these operatic sets that were giant penthouses where everything collapsed and went

ROBIN’S HOOD

For the Boy Wonder, three really is the charm

A Boy Wonder in Tim Burton’s *Batman* utopia? It almost happened in the first two films, directed by Tim Burton, but unforeseen circumstances (and apparently a lack of interest on Burton’s part in bringing another hero into the fold) forced Robin to wait in the wings.

In *Batman*, the Joker was to have run through Gotham Central Park, where a small circus family, the Flying Graysons, have set up a performance. Before they get a chance to attract an audience, the Joker (being pursued by Batman) drives right through their setup, collapsing one of the towers, and everyone but young Dick Grayson plummets to their death.

Pat Hingle, who has played Commissioner Gordon in all three films, recalls that at this point Batman tells Grayson to hop into the Batmobile as they continue to pursue the Joker. “At the end of the film you see Alfred making up a bedroom in Bruce Wayne’s mansion, with Alfred asking his boss, ‘How long will the young gentleman be with us, sir?’ with Wayne replying, ‘I don’t know—who else has he got?’” recalls Hingle.

While casting was only in the preliminary stages at that time, teen actor Ricky Addison Reed, who had just appeared as Michael Moriarty’s son in the Larry Cohen-directed *A Return to Salem’s Lot*, was briefly considered for the role of Robin.

By the time *Batman Returns* began, Burton had come up with a more jokey approach to the sidekick formula—Robin would be a mechanic. With the set built and Marlon Wayans cast as a daring black Robin, the lore was getting a major revisionary reworking.

“After the Batmobile gets mangled up, Bruce Wayne brought it into an auto shop to this ace mechanic,” recalls Hingle. “The kid gets the motor going again and tells Batman, ‘I better ride along with you just in case this thing poops out.’”

Obviously the thread to previous Robins was very thin, but he did have one identifiable trait—a patch with an initial “R” that immediately signalled who this young mechanical wonder-kid would become.

“I thought the concepts shouldn’t be tampered with,” says *Batman*-comic creator Bob Kane. “It’s like making a black Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes. It’s okay if I created it that way, but it should stay with the original conception rather than going a different route. It was just a germ of an idea though. I think Tim just thought about it and the powers-that-be at Warner’s vetoed it, so it fell by the wayside.”

However, from its very inception, *Batman Forever* was designed to be the “true” introduction of Dick Grayson, with Chris O’Donnell finally stepping into the boots of the Boy Wonder.

Making a career out of nice-guy character pieces (*Scent of a Woman*, *Circle of Friends*), O’Donnell found it challenging to jump into an action role for a change—but it did have its scary moments.

“I had to do this second unit shot where I was underwater, and I had never scuba dived before,” explains O’Donnell. “So I’m in this Robin costume, they have weights on me to hold me to the bottom of the pool, and they had given me a ten-minute lesson on how to scuba dive right before. I had this little respirator and then this frogman rips it out of my mouth and I can’t breathe—I’m struggling. The water was murky and I had goggles on, so I couldn’t see either. Then I grabbed the respirator and I’d suck in and I drew water. I didn’t know I had to press the button for air. So I was freaking out. I thought I was going to die.”

For the sake of the film, O’Donnell made it out in the nick of time—like most superheroes. As for his new status as a budding young action star, the 24-year-old actor is trying hard to stay humble. He still wants to move between smaller, character-driven films and bigger action epics.

“The way Hollywood works is, as soon as they like you in something, they want to see you do it again,” says O’Donnell. “After *Scent of a Woman*, all they wanted me to do was play nice guys. Now they see *Batman Forever* and they want me to do action films. Luckily that’s not all I’m offered and that’s not all I’m interested in. I want to try all the different kinds of things you should be allowed to do as an actor.”

—A.C. Ferrante

